

2007 Review of Projects

In August I noted that I had taken on an enormous number of projects and did not suspect they would all succeed. (It has since been pointed out to me that one of the secrets of successful people is that they try a lot of projects and then you only see the successes. So perhaps this is not as bad a strategy as I initially thought.) Now that the year has come to a close, I thought I would review the projects I mentioned there and see how they were doing.

Open Library: Moderate success. Open Library has a team of six or so people working on it. It's not progressing as quickly as I would like, but it is progressing. The demo site has launched and there are no big hurdles in our path. Personally, I've learned an enormous amount about managing projects.

Memoir: Failed. At the end of last year, I planned to start this year to take a week to write a memoir of life at Reddit. The writing proceeded on schedule but towards the middle of the week I fell terribly ill, realized I would not be happy with the resulting book, and reluctantly abandoned it. Why did it fail? There were lots of mid-level reasons (I'm not that interesting a subject, my memory of the period was poor, I was doing it with impure motives) but the fundamental one was that I just did not honestly believe a memoir of my time at Reddit was a book that was worth reading. I only lost a couple days, so this was not a devastating failure.

Psychology book: On hold. After the Reddit book, I began researching and outlining a book about the highlights of psychology. I am still interested in this book and think about it a fair amount, but I put the project on hold after I started work on Open Library.

Another book: Unknown. In the other post I said I was working on three books. I can't remember what the third one is now. I think about different books a lot but I don't think I've pursued any others very seriously.

Consult on Berkeley Big Ideas: Failed. I had no big ideas for helping this project and I did not follow through on finding any. I had made no strong commitments, so I do not consider this a serious failure.

JobBook: Intermediate. An initial site is launched but I have not spent a lot of time on it nor is it progressing rapidly. Other people are pursuing it, though, so I feel less pressure.

Science That Matters: Intermediate. This site has launched and a fair number of posts have been written, but it hasn't been updated in a while and nobody else has really joined seriously. But the site hasn't been officially abandoned, so it's not a total failure.

Jottit: Moderate success. The site was finished and launched and got incredibly positive reviews but hasn't really caught fire with traffic yet. Perhaps this is because it's a great product that no one wants to use or perhaps we simply haven't figured out how to market it yet. (If you want to try to market it, contact me@aaronsw.com.)

Statful: Intermediate. This was a project I mentored for Summer of Code to allow for better web stats visualization. I was a fairly bad mentor, in retrospect. A fair amount of the coding got done for this project but I did not have a clear design in place ahead of time so the software is not especially usable. If any readers want to help work on the design for a free software web stats analyzer (you know, something that will tell you who's visiting your site) please email me@aaronsw.com. I still think the project is finishable but it certainly has languished for a while.

Seddit: Failure. This was the other Summer of Code project. The code got written but not tested or launched and has since languished. The schedule budgeted time for launching the project but apparently not enough. I think the lesson here is that in such projects launching should be done first and features added later, so that whatever results is usable. Also, I should be a better mentor.

Gmail clone: Failure. I got a couple of people started working on this project but I didn't follow through because I felt too overloaded. However, people have since pointed me to Posterity and Sup. Again, the consequences weren't too bad. I wasted some people's time, but not an enormous amount.

Book reader: Intermediate. I finished 70% of this but never launched it. Just never got around to it. The same was true of a number of other web projects.

Journalism: Success. I had two articles published for money and a third is on its way to the editor.

Paper: Intermediate. Plagued by difficulties, the paper has been teetering on the brink of failure for another year. I think a big problem was not having a partner who had enough time to push me about it more.

Novel: Intermediate. I had to stop working on the novel when I got sick but I mostly did it on time when I was OK and a shocking number of people seemed to actually read it. I will try to finish it early this year.

All in all, I think it was a fairly mixed year project-wise. A couple minor failures, a couple minor successes, and a couple big projects where time will tell. In truth, it may be too soon to evaluate this year. If Open Library becomes a big success, this year will have been well worthwhile. Otherwise, its legacy will be more mixed.

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